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PARTNERSALBANIA
FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF RISI ALBANIA'S INTERVENTION IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Quality is the key, for long-lasting benefits!

This impact factsheet distills the core findings and methodology of a comprehensive study evaluating the impact of the RisiAlbania project on the Albanian sustainable, inland tourism sector. The study explores how Risi Albania's multifaceted support ranging from support to strategic partnerships, innovation expertise and networking— has encouraged tour operators to foster their ties to local SME partners, such as guesthouses, restaurants, and artisans while introducing new and sustainable tourism products. A fundamental component of the research is its comparative design, which distinguishes between a treatment group (beneficiaries of Risi's interventions) and a control group (similar entities not involved in the project), enabling a robust assessment of outcomes. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines 82 structured interviews across Gjirokastra and Pogradec with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions involving tour operators, youth, local institutions, and associations like Visit Gjirokastra.

This impact factsheet offers a concise yet comprehensive reference for stakeholders seeking to understand the transformative effects of Risi Albania's interventions and the evolving landscape of tourism in Albania. The research was conducted during 2024, by IDRA.

Pursuing the objective of job creation, RisiAlbania addressed this subliminal tourism development potential by cooperating on one side with tour operators to attract tourism demand, on the other engaging with destination organisations, foremost the 'VisitGjirokastrë Association – VGA', to profile and promote the area's offer. Additionally mediating businesses and state authorities' cooperation.



Photo by Caravan Horse Riding

In 2012 there were no more than 20 businesses operating in the accommodation sector with the offer consisting of mainly hotels and very few guesthouses.

As of 2025 around 449 business units provide accommodation with an offer that is diversified among 107 hotels, 138 Guesthouses, 22 Bed and Breakfasts and 182 Rental Apartments. The food and accommodation segment of the tourism offer alone, in the Gjirokastra region offers year-round employment for roughly 5000 people.

Family-owned businesses, where less than 5 employees work full time, remain to the day a characteristic of Gjirokastrë as a region. The boom in tourism of the recent years has increased the pressure on the smaller businesses that had to either suffer from the lack of workforce or innovate and create a quality offer that allows for higher prices and lower volumes.

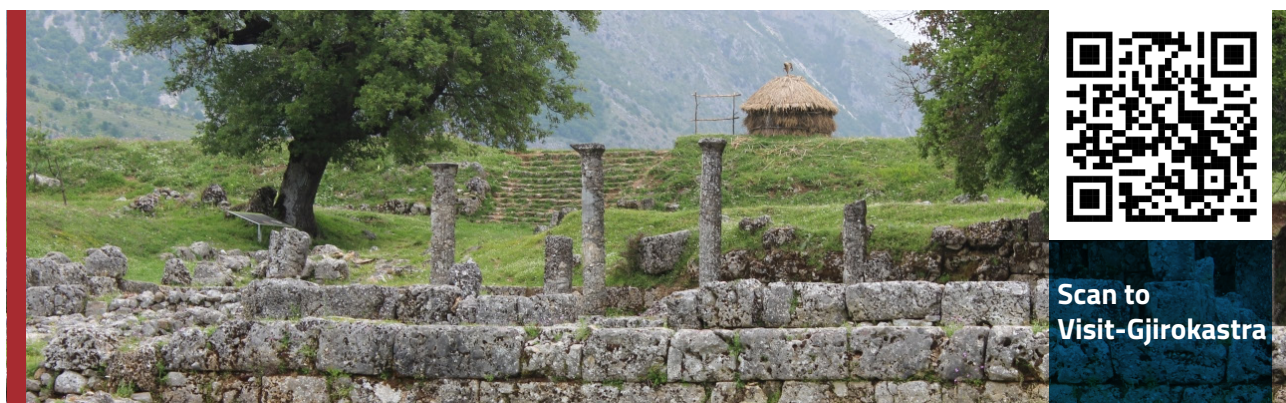


Photo by Visit GJIROKASTRA

RisiAlbania emphasis on quality vs quantity has promoted a business model characterised by five features:



Local businesses develop and sell services during off - **and shoulder seasons**, which enables them to offer **year-round employment**.



Generate packages of products that allow **longer stays in the region** – an important feature towards a slow, resource-minded tourism that is **environmentally, socially and economically sound**.



Introduce **quality management systems** (QMS) that justify higher prices and thus generate more income from better-valued assets.



Offer decent working conditions and make **jobs in tourism attractive**, especially for young women and men.

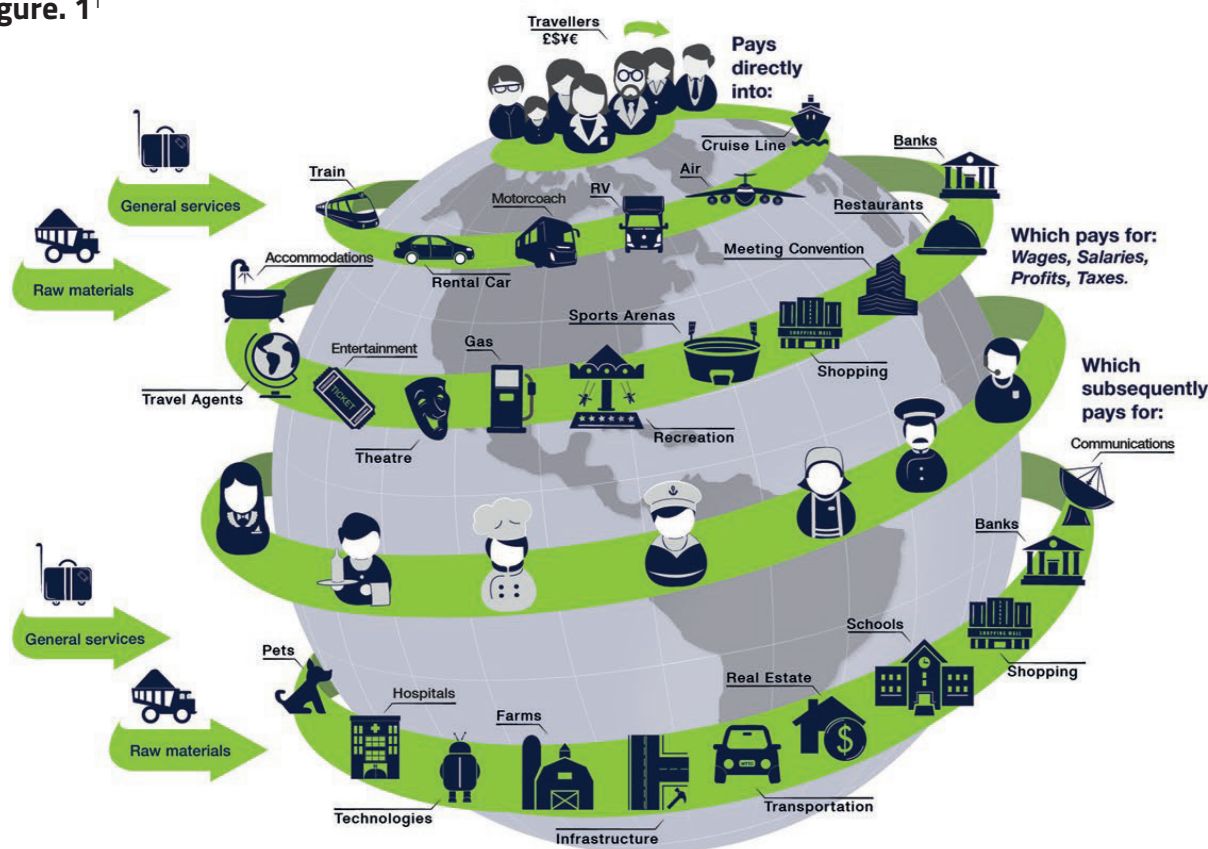


Strive for **increased resilience** through established and fostered relationships with business partners, predominantly tour operators that bring guests who look for **authentic experiences**, enjoy intact nature and **take time to connect with people**.

Developments in the tourism market system **bring along multiple and lasting benefits**. The progress and development of SME-s pushes local economies and provide work for the youth.

"If we act smart about it, tourism does not have to be a threat to our culture. Sustainable tourism gives us the chance to maintain our culture alive and build a better future for our youth at the same time." - Tour operator.

Figure. 1¹



In **2025**, about 1 in 4 working Albanian is engaged in a tourism related activity. The picture above illustrates how tourism is an all-influencing sector, and it brings value to the whole society.

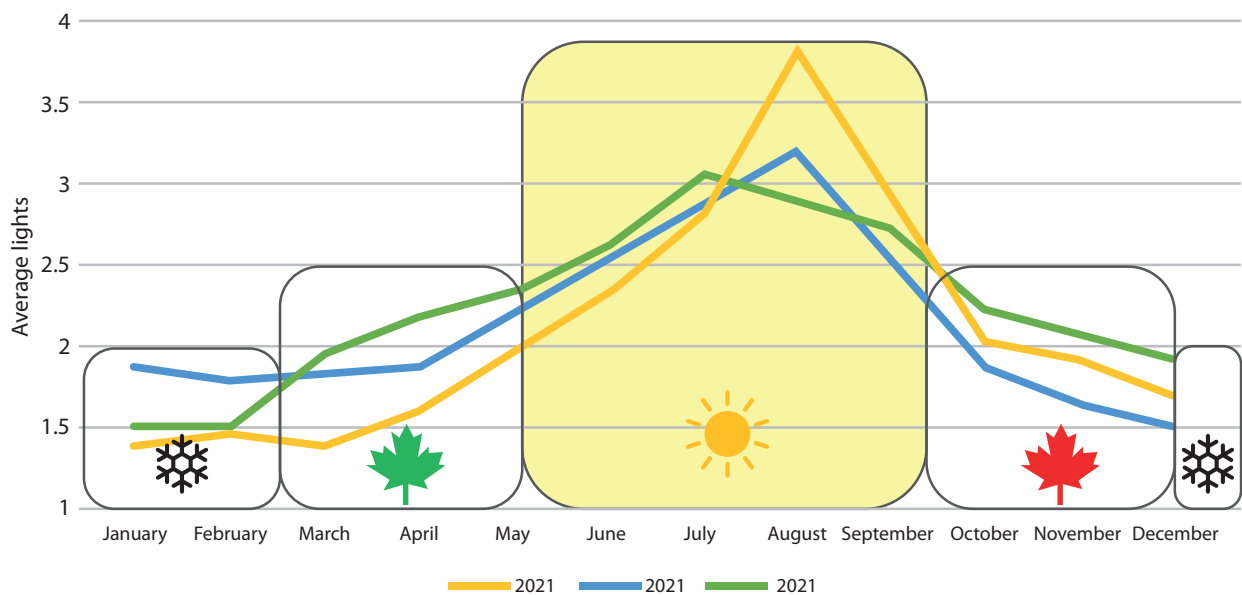
As a result of introducing innovative business models, Tour operators, their local SME partners, Destination associations and their members have created **1'319 jobs** during the last five years.

In addition, an estimated **800 jobs** were created by small and medium businesses, who copied the innovative business model introduced by Risi and its partners, but were not in direct contact with the project interventions.

Gjirokastër extended the tourism season, lasting now from March up to the end of October instead of May to August.

This shift has resulted in an extended peak season as well, with the peak period now beginning earlier and extending beyond the traditional summer months.

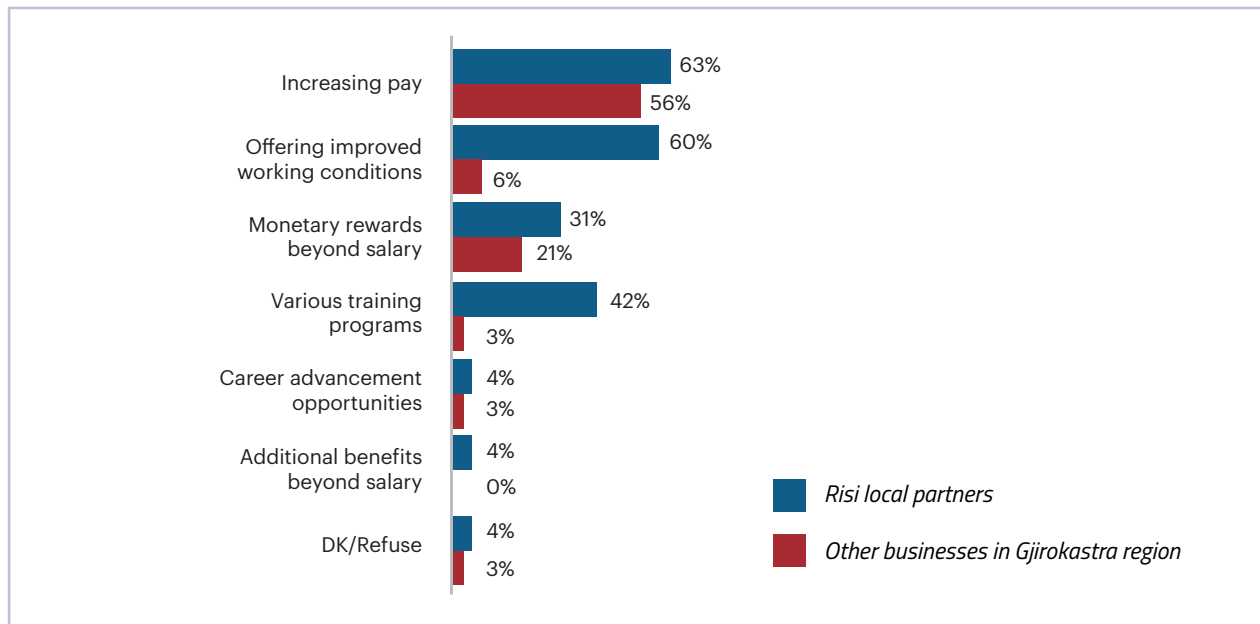
1. Figure 1: Improving competitiveness of SMMEs through the Private Sector Development Programme Botswana. International Trade Center



Businesses who apply quality management systems are proven to:



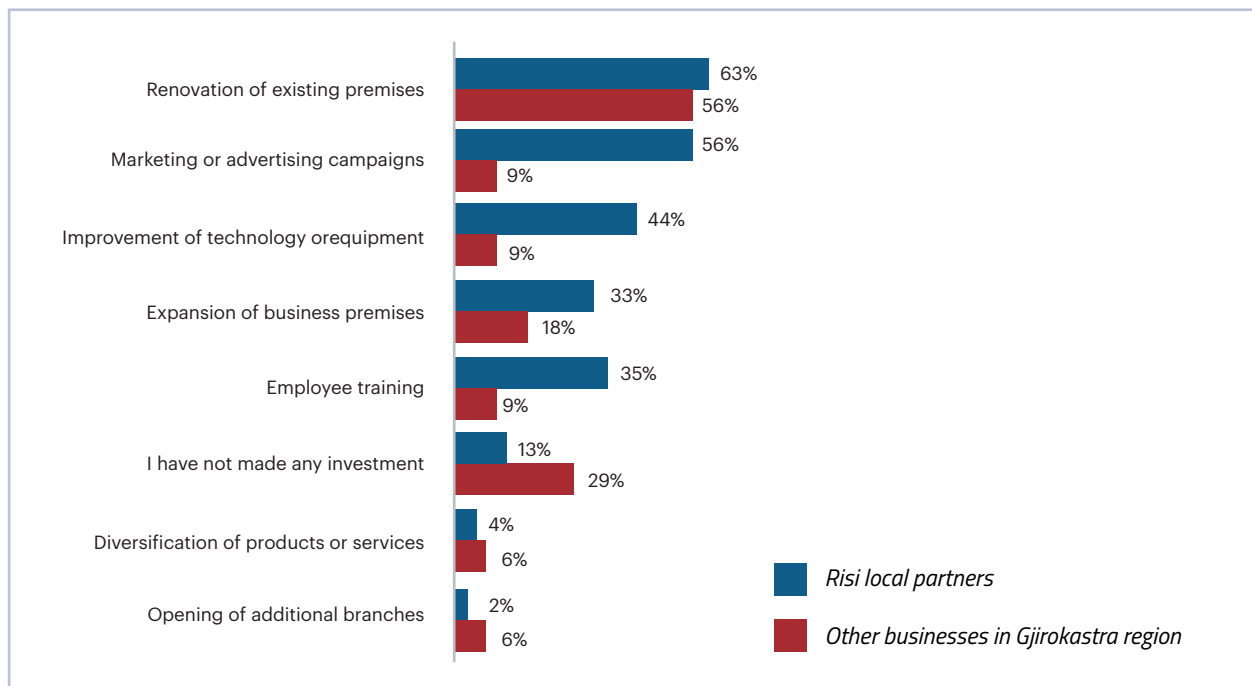
Offer decent jobs, including increased pay, skills trainings, provision of meals, accommodation and transport. They offer sound work-life balance and opening space for personal growth.



Measures to keep employees motivated (treatment group (N=48) blue, control group (N=34) red)



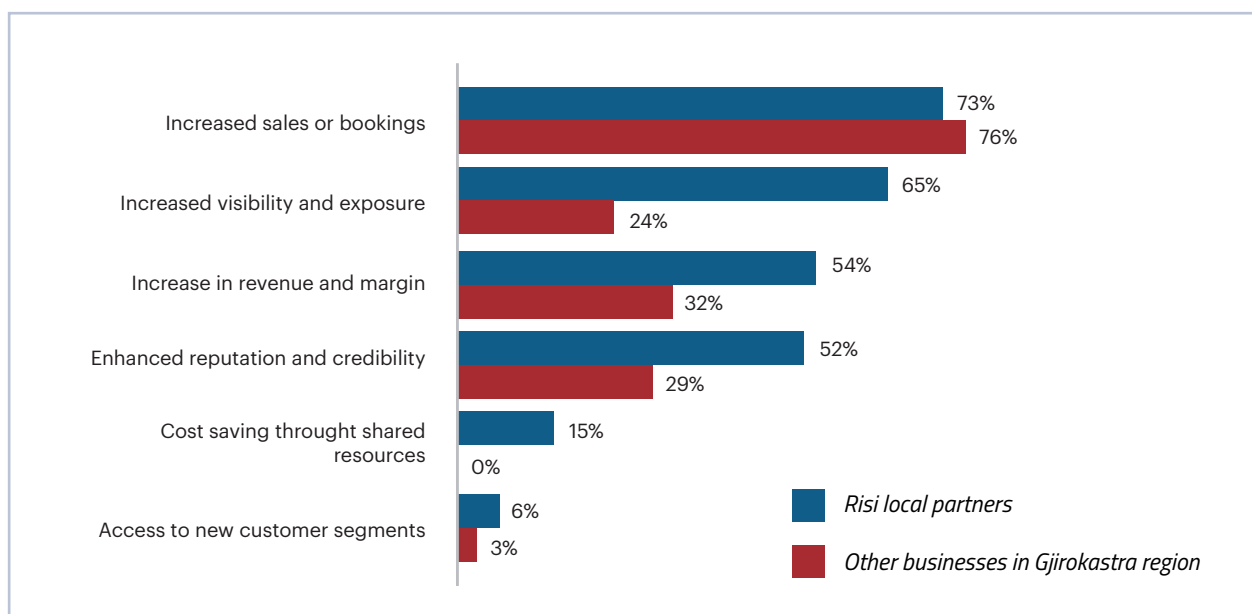
Invest with long-term perspectives such as premises, equipment marketing and training of people. They assess the market better and develop a joint vision with their collaborators, then investing purposefully.



investments for the last five years (treatment, N=40, blue; control, N=34, red)



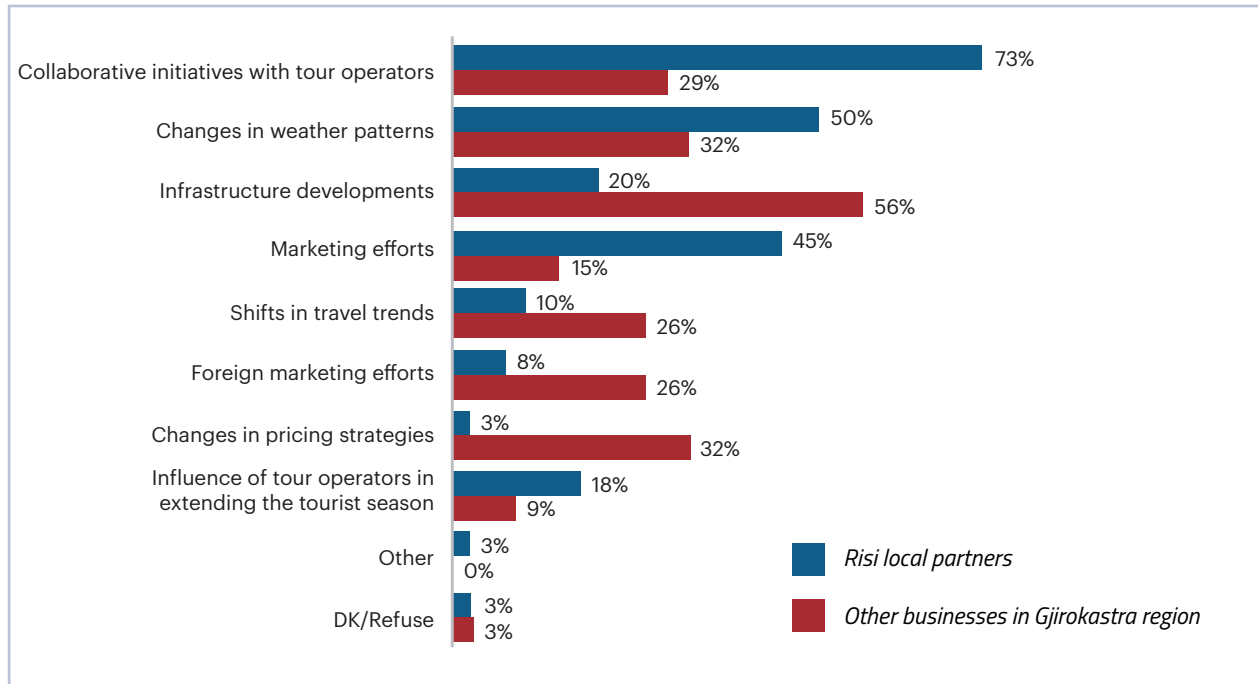
Cooperation with the tour operator brings **better resilience and enhanced reputation**. They can generate better margins on lower turnover thus higher productivity. They have a reliable network of collaborators and care for each-other's success.



Benefits out of cooperation with tour operators (treatment blue, N=48, control N=34 red)



Perceive developments in tourism because of targeted product development **and** proactive engagement/ promotion rather than general trends.



Assumed causes of seasonal pattern changes (treatment, N=40, blue; control, N=34, red)

The results underline the importance of quality services and the further need to foster quality-based business models that are embedded in village-based eco-systems while consequently following the strategic positioning of inland destinations. The study also shows the paramount importance of human capital in advanced entrepreneurship and generating jobs.

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IN TOURISM!

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